



"Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups and organizations"

Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative

Public Health Committee

March 14, 2007

My name is Stan Kosloski and I am the Project Director of the Disability Advocacy Collaborative, a statewide cross-disability coalition of activists. The Collaborative draws from the collective strength and energy of individuals with disabilities and families, as well as the dozens of advocacy organizations that exist in the state, in order to have a meaningful impact on the way services and supports are provided children and adults with disabilities.

I would like to speak in favor of Raised House Bill 7007, AN ACT RENAMING THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL RETARDATION and Raised Senate Bill 1194 AN ACT CONCERNING NOTIFICATION TO THE OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OF DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION INMATE SUICIDES AND DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES CLIENT DEATHS.

Regarding Raised House Bill 7007, one of the major handicaps preventing people with disabilities from achieving their rightful place in society alongside their peers is not their disabilities but the stigma often associated with disability. This phenomenon reveals itself in the societal attitudes toward the disability which we have previously referred to as "mental retardation". Renaming DMR will not eliminate the stigma, but it will demonstrate Connecticut's changing attitudes toward disability, and will lay the foundation for attitudinal changes still to come.

Think for a minute how agencies like the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, the African American Affairs Commission, and the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission might have been named if they were created 50 years ago. I dare say the terms "Women", "African American", and "Latino and Puerto Rican" would not have been the words legislators of that

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era would have chosen to use. And I can guarantee you that with the evolution of the civil rights movement, advocates for those constituencies would have come to you with great ferocity, insisting that whatever negatively charged terms were being used be changed to reflect respect and value for the affected populations. The concern of people with intellectual disabilities is no different.

Changing the name of DMR will not make the disability disappear, but it will move us as a state a few steps closer to the day when the stigma associated with disability will become less a barrier, and when people with labels will be seen as people first, and the disability will assume a secondary consideration, as it should.

I would also ask your support for Raised Senate Bill 1194 AN ACT CONCERNING NOTIFICATION TO THE OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES OF DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION INMATE SUICIDES AND DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES CLIENT DEATHS. This legislation will allow for an independent review of inmate suicides and client deaths where necessary, and in the long run will serve as a safeguard, protecting our most vulnerable citizens from future harm.

I thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today.